Political Advisers and Policy Making in Ministerial Cabinet Systems: the case of Belgium, Greece & the European Commission

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Introduction

While in the Westminster community of nations the ascend of political advisers is a relatively recent phenomenon, in others there is a long tradition of engaging ministerial cabinets, as the structural interfaces between politics and administration. Relatively large, ministerial cabinets consist of seconded civil servants and external political appointees who as an extension of their minister are in a superior position in relation to departmental senior civil servants. Ministerial cabinet advisers constantly put pressure on civil servants to ensure political responsiveness, while they are endowed with crucial policy-making roles and colonise all stages of the policy process (James 2007, OECD 2011).

Research thus far has been particularly focused on the partitocratic and non-partitocratic functions and dysfunctions of the ministerial cabinet (Brans & Steen 2006, Carcassonne 1986, Di Mascio and Natalini 2013, Eraly 2001, Gaffney 1991, Göransson 2008, Quermonne 1994, Schrameck 1995, Schreurs, Vandenabeele, Steen, & Brans 2010, Sotiropoulos 2007, Suleiman 1974, Walgrave, Caals, Suetens and De Swert 2004). Research with a specific focus on ministerial cabinet advisers has been much more limited (De Visscher et al 2015, Gouglas 2015, Gouglas et al. 2014, Pelgrims et al. 2008, Vancoppenolle 2011). Given the centrality of the ministerial cabinet institution in the Napoleonic administrative tradition it is not a surprise that empirical studies have thus far focused primarily on the institution rather than the actors within it. On the one hand, ministerial cabinets form mini shadow administrations that control the public administration, serve as career pools and recruitment mechanisms for professional politicians and facilitate the promotion of befriended civil servants. On the other hand, they serve as communication and coordination mechanisms, brain trusts that address policy capacity deficits, sources of organisational flexibility and loyalty (Walgrave, Caals, Suetens and De Swert 2004, Brans & Steen 2006, James 2007). Ministerial cabinets dominate the policy advisory system (PAS) in countries with a Napoleonic administrative tradition. Policy quality or the responsiveness of the administration to politics depends on the performance of the ministerial cabinets and their members. This is why the study of ministerial cabinet advisers is crucial.

The study of ministerial cabinet system advisers is important for a second reason too. With the exception of the US, which is the only example of a non-cabinet system where advisers directly manage other political appointees, as well as civil servants, we may be observing a process of "cabinetisation" in non-ministerial cabinet systems, which started in the 1980s and continues till today. Though neither uniform, nor equally intense, it may be argued that this process of "cabinetisation" consists of the following developments: a) increasing numbers of advisers, b) widening of the scope of advisers' policy work, c) increased pressure towards the administration for political responsiveness, d) more blurred politico-administrative boundaries, e) increased use of advisers for coordination, f) increased public sector and citizen concern over advisers' roles. In this respect the study of ministerial cabinet system advisers could enlighten other administrative and executive traditions that have been witnessing or dealing with such "cabinetisation" pressures. Seen under this light, research on ministerial cabinet system advisers can be argued to fall within both first wave (covering empirical gaps), as well as what Shaw and Eichbaum (2015) called second wave research on advisers (opting for new angles, concepts and approaches to the topic).

In the present paper we do not deal with the concept of "cabinetisation". Interesting as this might be, it is left as a suggestion for future research. Our present goal is to analyse ministerial cabinet advisers' policy roles taking into account both substantive and dimensional considerations. We attempt to answer three fundamental questions:

a) Do ministerial cabinet advisers colonise the policy process as previous studies of ministerial cabinets, the institutional habitat of advisers, suggest?
b) Is there a dominant adviser type found within ministerial cabinets and if yes which one is it and how can it be explained?
c) What are the dimensions (vertical and horizontal) of ministerial cabinet advisers' work and is their work in every dimension a core institutional responsibility or an opportunity to be grabbed by those actors on an ad hoc basis?

In order to answer our questions we use

a) the policy cycles heuristic, as presented by Howlett et al (2009)
b) the four adviser types, developed by Connaughton (2010a, 2010b, 2015)
c) the three arenas, developed by Maley (2015)

Our cases are Belgium, Greece and the European Commission. Belgium has a historical and closest to the ideal type ministerial cabinet system and is a consociational democracy. Greece has a much more recent ministerial cabinet system and is a majoritarian democracy. The European Commission cabinet system historically precedes Greece, but is a supranational organisation, at times referred to a *sui generis* polity. Data has been collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews within three different research projects. The structure of the paper is as follows. The first section presents our theoretical framework and methods. The second section shortly introduces us into the context of the Belgian, Greek and European Commission cabinet systems. The third section addresses the question on adviser's work at the various policy cycle stages. The fourth section classifies ministerial cabinet adviser types. The fifth section analyses advisers' work on the three arenas. Finally, we summarize by critically discussing our findings.

1. Theory and Methods

1.1 The Policy cycle

Linking advisers' activities to the policy cycle stages is a way to achieve a first systematic interpretation of their policy advice activity. Where in the cycle are they most active? The literature reveals that ministerial cabinets have a central role in the "design, formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policy" (James 2007, p. 17). We therefore hypothesize along similar lines. Ministerial cabinet advisers colonize all stages of the policy cycle. In the present paper, we use the five stages of the policy cycle presented by Howlett, Ramesh, and Perl (2009): (i) agenda setting, (ii) policy formulation, (iii) decision making, (iv) policy implementation, and (v) policy evaluation. We measure advisers' policy cycle location using data on frequency of time spent collected through a single question of a questionnaire survey.

1.2 Types

According to Connaughton (2010a, 2010b, 2015) there are four types of adviser: Type I is the expert, who is a specialist, politically passive, works on a specific policy field using knowledge, the impact of his work being expertise. Type II is the partisan who is responsive to the minister's mission, highly political in all dimensions and closely associated with the minister, his impact being political dominance. Type III is the coordinator who is a generalist, politically variable (active or passive), provides oversight to the government program and acts as a fixer, his impact being management. Type IV is the minder who is a generalist but also responsive to the Minister. Unlike the Partisan who is a 'party apparatchik', the Minder is the minister's bodyguard (Connaughton 2010a, p. 63) politically active, looking "for issues potentially harmful" to the political executive (Connaughton 2010b, p. 351-352). The impact of the minder is mutuality.

Where do ministerial cabinet advisers stand in relation to the above typology? Are there any theory driven hypotheses we could make in advance? The literature on ministerial cabinets offers a series of conflicting hypotheses.

H1: The dominant ministerial cabinet system adviser profile is that of the expert

Using numbers of advisers and dominant adviser types, Schreurs et al (2010, p. 19 – 20) have grouped countries in three categories. In the first category we find countries where the dominant type is the Strategic Adviser (Type A), who is to be found in small numbers, and who is recruited on the basis of personal trust, having a role in strategy formulation and strategic steering. The UK is here a prime example. In the second category we find countries where the dominant type is the Media Advisor (Type B), who is also to be found in small numbers. However, the adviser here is usually an assistant performing various tasks including communications functions, having limited potential to steer strategic decisions. A typical case of Type B advisory arrangements is to be found (?) in the Netherlands. In the third category we find countries where the dominant type of adviser is the Expert (Type C). The expert provides for technical expertise and in contrast to the previous two categories, where the advisers are few in numbers, he or she is to be found in greater numbers within a ministerial cabinet. France and Belgium are here the most typical cases.

H2: The dominant ministerial cabinet adviser profile is that of the partisan working in an institution which performs crucial partitocratic functions

Ministerial cabinets perform specific partitocratic functions, allowing for a firm hold of partisan politics on the administration (Walgrave et al 2004, p. 8). Advisers in this respect are expected to be highly politically active agents that sharpen the difference between politics and the administration.

H3: Ministerial cabinet advisers are predominantly political policy managers who coordinate policy

Recent empirical work on ministerial cabinet advisers in Greece (Gouglas 2015) and the European Commission (Gouglas, Brans, Chaslaridis 2014), which explicitly used Connaughton's (2010a, 2010b, 2015) four types, has pointed to advisers being primarily fixers who mend and monitor policy. Except for fixers advisers are also projected as politically aware agents who also care for protecting the political executive from potential harm.

H4: There is no dominant adviser type, but a multitude of roles contingent upon system, nature of policy portfolio, and the attitudes of political executives

The analysis of the policy role of political advisers is ridden with certain challenges. One such fundamental challenge reflects the nature and dimension of the policy work those actors undertake: a) advisers undertake multiple tasks, b) their policy work is highly variable and c) their work can also be highly contingent (Maley 2015, p. 47). It is for this reason that many scholars are wary of using classification schemes and types to abstractly describe the policy work of advisers (Maley 2015).

In order to categorize advisers into types we collect data on the following characteristics suggested by Connaughton's (2010a) typology: profile, political role, communication role, policy role and impact. The data is collected through a series of questionnaire survey questions ranging from ranking primary job functions to giving the frequency of time spent in broad political, communication and policy related activities and more specific tasks.

Table 1. Characteristics of adviser roles

Role	Profile	Political	Communicate	Policy-making role	Impact
Expert	Specialist	Passive	Technical	Knowledge	Expertise
Partisan	Responsive	Active	Political	Politics	Political dominance
Coordinator	Generalist	Variable	Both	Fixer	Management
Minder	Generalist/ responsive	Active	Political	Politics/passive	Mutuality

Figure 1: Characteristics of adviser roles. Source Connaughton 2010a

1.3 Arenas

According to Maley (2015, p.47) "it is useful to understand the policy work of partisan staff as occurring in three different arenas: working with the department; working with other ministers (within the political executive) and working with stakeholders". In each of the above arenas advisers' roles have a different character and purpose. In some of them policy activities are part of a core part of advisers' work, arising from the institutional dynamics and context in which this work is embedded. In others, advisers' work is seen as an opportunity, rather than as responsibility. In the case of Australia, the first and second arenas come up as core policy work dimensions. Working with the department means supervising, orienting and mobilising departments, generating ideas, developing and implementing policy (Maley 2015, p.48-50). Working within the executive means facilitating decision making, resolving policy conflict and coordinating new policy (Maley 2015, p. 51-53). The third arena comes up as more of an opportunity rather than as a responsibility. The third arena involves horizontal policy work. It is where ideas are linked to interests and opportunities, mobilisation and bargaining in terms of building political support takes place, and policy is delivered (Maley 2015, p. 53-54). What should we expect to be the case for ministerial cabinet system advisers?

H5: Ministerial cabinet system adviser work within the department is a core responsibility

The literature reveals that advisers in ministerial cabinets "both advise the minister and exercise control over the ministry in his/her name" OECD (2011, p. 23). Advisers in such systems interfere in the chain of command issuing instructions and giving orders, exposing "civil servants to pressures to breach their political neutrality" (James 2007, p. 9). In view of this, ministerial cabinet advisers' work within the department should be expected as a core responsibility, exercised mostly in a top down manner (control and command).

H6: Ministerial cabinet adviser work across the executive is a core responsibility

Arguably, working in the second arena should also be regarded as part of ministerial cabinet advisers' core work. Coordination/communication has been suggested as one of four main 'policy' oriented, 'non-partitocratic' ministerial cabinet functions (Walgrave et al 2004, p. 9). Be it due to a coalition government tradition (Belgium) or as an answer to core executive and even administrative fragmentation (Greece, EC), the expectation here is that the average ministerial cabinet adviser is highly active in working within the executive.

H7: Ministerial cabinet adviser work with stakeholders becomes a responsibility as we move from non-coordinated, non-cooperative patterns of policy formation to more institutionalised ones

Finally, as ministerial cabinet theory is largely vague on this, expectations in regards to ministerial cabinet advisers' work in the third arena become more difficult to define. In a consociational democracy, with a moderately strong corporatist tradition like the Belgian one (Siaroff 1999, p.184), we would expect advisers work with stakeholders to come up as more of a responsibility rather than opportunity. The same applies to the European Commission, who projects a tradition of systematically granting access to interest groups, as well as activating stakeholders to participate through various measures (ie Forum politics). On the contrary, we would not expect this to be the

case for Greece, since majoritarian executive politics dominate, leading to a pattern of policy formation that is largely non-coordinated and non-cooperative.

1.4 Methods

The present paper is not derived by a single cohesive study. It is the result of three separate studies on Greek, European Commission and Belgian advisers designed and conducted in three different periods: 2012-2013, 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 respectively. All three studies fall within the framework of a common research line on political advisers in ministerial cabinet systems.

The choice to focus on these three ministerial cabinet system cases reflects a combination of methodological and pragmatic reasons. In relation to the former the idea was to investigate a historical, close to the ideal-type, ministerial cabinet system, a newer one and an established/consolidated one, but at the supranational level. In relation to the latter we chose Belgium instead of France and Greece instead of Portugal or Italy because of better access to data and linguistic proximity of the researchers. Finally, the European Commission is the only established/consolidated ministerial cabinet system at the supranational level. The idea is to gradually cover the whole population of ministerial cabinet systems.

All three studies have been using mixed data collection methods relying on a questionnaire survey followed by interviews with advisers and the people they work most closely with (ministers and senior civil servants) in order to triangulate the data (table 1). As already mentioned above data have been collected on the policy cycle, profiles, political, communication and policy roles, adviser impact and the arenas in which they work. For this we used forced choice questions the majority of which asked advisers to either rank or point to frequencies of time spent in various activities. Some open questions were also used in case respondents wanted to add something. The interviews took place with advisers who have already completed the questionnaire, were accessible and their answers raised interesting further questions.

Table 1: summary of data collection methods

Ministerial Cabinet System	**Survey**	**Interviews**
Belgium (2014-2015)	25-item survey with both forced-choice and open-ended questions distributed to 88 advisers in 18 ministerial cabinets of the Belgian federal government as they stood in March 2014 Respondents N= 40 (7F– 25M, postgraduates degrees 93,75%, experience with public sector 64,9%) Response rate = 45,5%	3 semi-structured interviews with advisers *Interviews are still taking place
Greece (2012-2013)	28-item survey with both forced-choice and open-ended questions distributed to 65 advisers in two purposefully selected ministerial cabinets of the Ministry for Development	2 Interviews with the cabinet's ministers

	Respondents N= 28 (19M – 9F, 67,8% postgraduate degrees, 46,4% with previous cabinet experience) Response rate = 43,1%	4 interviews with senior civil servants at the Director and Director General Level
European Commission (2014-2015)	19-item survey with both forced-choice and open-ended questions distributed to 135 EC Cabinet advisers at all European Commission cabinets as they stood in May 2014. Respondents N= 16 (9F - 7M, 93,75% postgraduate degrees, 62,5% with experience from working in the Commission) Response rate = 11.8% **Work is being repeated due to low response rate. need >25%	4 interviews with Members of Cabinet
Total	Respondents N= 84 Response rate = 29,1%	Interviews N=10

2. Context

In Belgium, Greece, Italy, France, Portugal, the European Commission and increasingly Spain, ministerial cabinets (MCs) make up the institutional habitat of political advisers. This is different to the UK, Denmark, the Netherlands or Sweden, where advisers work alongside a neutral civil service and it is also different to cases such as for instance the Slovak Republic, where the bureaucracy's top tier is also politicised (James 2007, p. 9, OECD 2011, p. 23). A ministerial cabinet is not to be confused with a government cabinet comprising ministers. While it may be seen as part of the core executive, it essentially forms a formal institutionalised political and policy advisory system. It differs from other systems in that its members not only advise the minister but also provide political direction and management to the entire ministry. They issue instructions to the ministry in the minister's name, while its leading members usually have the right to sign documents on the minister's behalf and do often represent him/her at external events, speaking in his/her name both within and outside the ministry (James 2007). Ministerial cabinets are usually composed of a mixture of civil servants and external appointees, who are expected, at least, to be sympathetic to the minister's views (James 2007).

Ministerial cabinets and the political advisers working within them have been around as early as the beginning of parliamentary representative democracy in the 1800s (table 2). Belgium and France, the oldest and closest to the ideal type ministerial cabinet systems were initially set up to control monarchical influence, but later developed into instruments of political control and coordination. Post WWII they were followed by Italy and the European Commission, and since the 1980s by Greece and Portugal.

Table 2: Institutionalisation of ministerial cabinets: Belgium, Greece and the European Commission

Ministerial cabinet system	Year of establishment	Reason
Belgium	1840's	Emancipation from monarchical influence especially in policy & personnel allocation
Greece	1981-1985 Restoration of Democracy in 1974	First Socialist government aims to circumscribe the administrative hierarchy and establish political control over what was perceived as a right wing and hostile to its aspirations senior civil service
European Commission	1958 Creation of the EC & the EEC	To improve horizontal and vertical co-ordination within the EC To emphasize the political role the Commission was to play in the creation of European political Union

Advisers in ministerial cabinet systems are numerous in comparison to their counterparts in non-cabinet systems, where despite increases since the 1980s their number still remains comparatively limited. Table 3 summarises the size of the three ministerial cabinet systems under investigation.

Table 3: Cabinet size: Belgium, Greece and the European Commission

Ministerial Cabinet System	Number of Ministerial Cabinets	Total Number of Cabinet Staff (Advisory + Auxiliary)	Average cabinet size	Total Number of Advisers (de facto)	Average Total number of advisers per cabinet
Belgium Snapshot March 2014	18 + PM cabinet	534 (564 incl. PM)	29.7	De facto 440 Strict status 293	24,8 (de facto) 15,4 (strict status)
European Commission snapshot May 2014	28	621	22.2	Est. 229	8,2
Greece snapshot December 2012	37	Est. 1200	32.4	NA	Statutory 9 minimum to 34 maximum 4 Special Advisers or Sp. Associates 5 Scientific Associates (5 or 10 or 14 or 30)

The literature on ministerial cabinets reveals that their very *raison d' être* is associated to the functions they perform. It has been suggested that these functions can be divided into partitocratic and non-partitocratic ones (Walgrave et al 2004) or between political and policy functions (Brans et al. 2006; Brans and Steen 2006, p. 66). On the more partitocratic, political front, ministerial cabinets:

- Allow for a firm hold of partisan politics on the administration (Walgrave et al 2004, p. 8).
- Are tools for party control over ministers and for supporting party organisations, with political parties imposing senior personnel and at times even forcing lower personnel to the minister (Dewachter 1981 and De Winter 1981 quoted in Walgrave 2007, p. 8).
- Appear to form career pools and recruitment mechanisms for professional politicians (Brans and Steen 2007, p. 66).
- Sharpen the grasp of political parties on the civil service and the wider public sector as a whole, especially through facilitating the appointment and promotion of befriended civil servants (Walgrave 2004, p. 8).

Partitocratic functions, though, are arguably closely associated to the main dysfunctions of the ministerial cabinet system.

During the 1990s and before the Copernicus reform in the early 2000s, ministerial cabinets in Belgium were criticised for "encroachment" of their members on civil service' s territory, as well as for developing into "shadow administrations" frustrating the civil servants (Brans and Steen 2006, p. 67). It was for this reason that the Copernicus reform set to contain the dominance of ministerial cabinets, even abolishing them in name, as well as de-politicise the Belgian civil service. However, as Brans and Steen (2006, p. 77-78) inform us "ministerial cabinets were re-invented". The new rules were implemented in such a way as to "re-invent mechanisms of political control over the administration" (Brans et al 2006; Brans and Steen 2006, p. 77-78).

In Greece, the establishment of ministerial cabinets in the 1980s saw a confrontational start, when some civil servants resorted to the supreme administrative court in order keep political advisers at bay (Gouglas 2015, p. 18). The 1990s saw a new form of coexistence among politicians, political staff, and civil servants (Sotiropoulos, 2007). Spanou (2001, pp. 109–110) coined this a "symbiotic relationship," where top civil servants offer political submission and wide policy discretion to the political executive in return for taking the civil service's view into account, especially in personnel and management issues. However, as Sotiropoulos (2007) rightly pointed, despite the political elite being increasingly forced to take the views of the civil service into consideration, it has never really lost the upper hand. Cabinets still dominate the policy process in Greece, working as a "mini-public administration" (Gouglas 2015, p. 18).

Referring to the European Commission cabinets in the 1990s, Wille (2013, p.100) has described them as a shadow bureaucracy that increasingly resembles its national counterparts, one with 'too many pimply boys with too much power', who serve as the 'political eyes and ears' of their boss. Cabinets have also been central in the Commission staff policy, monitoring the national balance of staff, putting forward candidates for senior positions and interfering in appointments down to the most junior level (Seidel 2010 in Wille p. 101). Unlike Belgium and Greece, though, there seems to be wide agreement that the 1999 Prodi - Kinnock reform of the Commission administration normalised relations between the EC cabinets and the Commission high civil

service by redefining the roles of cabinets and drawing "sharper lines of responsibility between cabinets and services" (Wille 2013, p. 98). As Bauer and Ege (2013, p.193) argued at the start of the millennium, the Kinnock reform, which implemented crucial changes in strategic and personnel management, led to "an ever less politicised Commission administration, in an ever more politicised organisational context".

On the 'policy' (non-partitocratic) front Walgrave et al (2004, p. 9) has argued that ministerial cabinets serve four main functions:

a) Communication: By communication the authors refer primarily to coordination, which in the case of Belgium takes the form of coordination of the coalition government (Walgrave et al 2004, p. 9). Brans and Steen (2006, p.66) refer to ministerial cabinets as centres of communication and coordination, which facilitate the continuity to coalition government. In the case of Greece communication may be seen as coordination of a core executive government that has been described as fragmented and suffering from a "deep rooted problem of coordination" (Gouglas 2015, p. 17, Featherstone & Papadimitriou, 2013, pp. 524, 525). Similarly to Greece, the European Commission has also been described as suffering from fragmentation and deep coordination deficits due to the inherent characteristics of its organization (Seidel 2010 in Wille 2013, p. 101): on the one hand, Directorate Generals are thought to form small 'fiefdoms', accomplishing their duties in an introspective way and pursuing their own agendas; on the other hand, the Commission is composed of persons with no shared background, ideology or sense of common fate to bind them.
b) Expertise: Ministerial cabinets are also projected as "brain trusts" that pool expertise together (De Winter 1981, p. 66). Because of this function, James (2007), the OECD (2011) and Schreurs et al (2010) have gone as far to claim that the dominant type of adviser found in ministerial cabinet systems is the expert. However, as Brans and Steen (2006 p. 67) point out in the case of Belgium the production of policy advice occurs in ways that technical expertise is combined with political feasibility.
c) Flexibility. Ministerial cabinets allow for organisational flexibility. This refers to the customized nature of the organisation of a cabinet, so as to fit the needs of the political executive. Despite formal-legal arrangements pertaining the organisation of the cabinets, the status and numbers of advisers, as well as their employment framework, ministers in Belgium and Greece have discretion to organise the cabinet work according to their needs, even expand the cabinet size if necessary (Gouglas 2015, Gouglas et al 2014). Commissioners are here an exception as they are constrained by the codes of conduct, usually actively enforced by the President of the EC, but more so by the principle of denationalisation and gender balance of cabinet composition. However, even in the European Commission, the cabinet structure does provide Commissioner with enough flexibility to decide on organisational and personnel issues.
d) Loyalty: Safeguarding of loyalty to the person of the minister.

3. Ministerial cabinet system advisers and the policy cycle

Advisers were asked to point out the exact stage of the policy cycle where they thought they spent most of their working time. Overall, it may be argued that the findings on frequency of time spent at the various policy cycle stages (table 4) confirm the hypothesis that ministerial cabinet advisers enjoy a central role in the "design, formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policy" (James 2007, p. 17). Having said this, not all of the policy cycle stages come up as equally important. Using Howlett et al's (2009) policy hourglass metaphor, it may be argued that in ministerial cabinets, advisers' roles are more pronounced in certain stages than in others, looking much like a policy hourglass. The front (agenda setting and policy formulation) and back end (implementation, evaluation and monitoring) of the policy cycle form the two vertical glass bulbs connected by a neck (decision making) that regulates the trickle of policy. This policy hourglass looks of course very different from system to system.

It is in the Greek case where its shape is the most balanced. As we move from the top glass bulb, the front end of the policy cycle, we squeeze through a neck whose width is much thinner, decision making, only to trickle down to a much wider glass bulb, the back end of the policy cycle.

In the case of Belgium the shape becomes more distorted looking like more like a pyramid where advisers' role is progressively reduced as we move from stage to stage. This comes as a bit of a paradox if we consider that ministerial cabinets in Belgium hold power over what gets evaluated and what not, how, and with what degree of transparency.

Finally, in the case of the European Commission we virtually observe that hourglass has no neck, since advisers appear to colonise of all the first four stages of the policy cycle, leaving only evaluation and implementation with a thinner shape.

Taking the whole threes systems into consideration what we see is that advisers' roles look like a policy hourglass whose top glass bulb (front end) is over-expanded, trickling through a thinner neck down to a glass bulb (back end) that starts big (implementation), but ends thin in the very end (evaluation)

Table 4: Number of advisers & %, who spend time once a week + daily, per stage of the policy cycle (absolute numbers and percentages)

Policy Cycle Stage	European Commission N=16 no missing values	Greece N=28 no missing values	Belgium N=40, missing 7	Total Valid N=77
Recognizing problems - setting agenda priorities	14 (87.5%)	21 (75%)	23 (69,7%)	58 (75,3%)
Proposing Solutions and formulating policies	14 (87,5%)	20 (71.4%)	27 (81,8%)	61 (79,2%)
Deciding on the preferred course of action	14 (87,5%)	10 (35,7%)	18 (54,5%)	42 (54,5%)
Putting solutions into effect	12 (75%)	17 (60,7%)	17 (51,5%)	46 (59,7%)
Evaluating & Monitoring results	7 (43,75%)	15 (53,5%)	11 (33,3%)	33 (42,8%)

4. A classification of policy advisory roles

We now proceed in classifying ministerial cabinet advisers according to the four policy advisory roles suggested by Connaughton (2010, 2010b, 2015): the expert, the partisan, the coordinator and the minder. We achieve this by using collected data on policy expertise, primary job functions, frequency of activities undertaken and frequency of tasks performed. The aim is to describe the main characteristics of advisers' roles, suggested as important by the typology: profile (specialist, generalist or responsive), politics (active, passive or variable), communication (technical, political or both), policy making (knowledge, politics or fixer) and impact (expertise, political dominance, management or mutuality). Where data exists we triangulate our questionnaire findings with interview material.

4.1 Profile

Is the profile of the ministerial cabinet adviser that of a specialist, a generalist or is it simply responsive to the minister's mission? As the typology suggests, a specialist is a qualified expert in a specific policy field who also exercises this expertise in an assigned ministry portfolio. In view

of this, we asked advisers to describe whether, according to the work they do in the cabinet, they felt they fit in more appropriately to the role of a generalist or that of a specialist.

Table 5 presents the findings per ministerial cabinet system. With the exception of the European Commission, where advisers perceive themselves as mostly generalists, advisers' self-perceptions in Greece and Belgium are almost equally split in half.

Table 5: Generalists or Specialists? (Absolute numbers and percentages)

Specialist or Generalist	**European Commission** **N=16 no missing values**	**Greece** **N=28 no missing values**	**Belgium** **N=40, missing 4**
Generalists	11 (68,8%)	13 (46,4%)	18 (50%)
Specialists	5 (31,3%)	15 (53.5%)	18 (50%)

A first interpretation of this table would lead us to believe that Greece and Belgium conform to the expectation found in the literature that ministerial cabinet system advisers are principally specialists/experts, as opposed to the more generalist strategic advisers found for instance in the UK or the assistants / aides found for instance in Denmark (Schreurs et al. 2010). In light of this the European Commission appears as a bit of a residual case.

It would be misleading to take this data at face value. As Walgrave et al (2004, p.13) have argued for the case of Belgian ministerial cabinet advisers, "specialist expertise can only be assessed on the basis of the departmental stability of the MC activity". Self-perceptions need to be cross-examined. To what extent do advisers who perceive themselves as specialists work on a relevant to their specialisation/competence policy portfolio? In view of this we asked advisers to define their exact area of specialization. The majority of the advisers of our sample do project a high level of general expertise, be it in terms of level of education, previous work experience or experience from work in the public sector. However, as much as they are highly skilled, data on their actual work at the cabinet reveals that advisers of our sample are competence shifters, working mostly in different portfolios than their expert competence and changing such portfolios over time.

In the case of Greece, where self-perceptions of specialisation ran higher, from the 15 advisers who stated they are specialists, only 6 (40%), stated that they specialize in a ministry portfolio. In the case of Belgium from the 18 advisers perceiving themselves as specialists a bit more than half 10 (55%) stated the same. Even in the case of the European Commission, where perceptions appeared to be closer to reality, 1 adviser out of the 5 who claimed to be specialists was not.

Table 6: Specialists? Perceptions and reality

Specialists	**European Commission** **N=16 no missing values**	**Greece** **N=28 no missing values**	**Belgium** **N=40, missing 4**
Absolute number of self-perceived specialists & % of total adviser sample	5 (31,3%)	15 (53.5%)	18 (50%)
Absolute number of non-real specialists & % out of total number of self-perceived specialists	1 (25%)	6 (40%)	10 (55,6%)

The above findings are in line with previous large N research on Belgian advisers covering the period 1970 to 1999. Walgrave et al (2004, p.13) found that members of cabinets, despite their high expertise "do not show much homogeneity in the ministerial portfolios they serve". Ministerial cabinet advisers are not devoted in one policy branch, the one of their expertise, but alter positions frequently, demonstrating a high level of competence mobility. The above is also further corroborated by interview data.

As EC adviser 1 stated

I, despite being an expert in competition law, was asked to follow the economic crisis. [Own translation]

Belgian Adviser 30 also stated

There are a lot of files which in technical terms I did not know a lot about. Then I tried to become familiar with these topics, but I did not have any knowledge on them beforehand. I learned it thanks to the people in the administration. [Own translation]

4.2 Policy roles

Is the ministerial cabinet adviser a fixer, acting as a manager who facilitates the oversight of the ministry's agenda? Alternatively, does the policy role of this actor rely on knowledge or politics? Or is the ministerial cabinet system adviser policy passive, simply minding the minister? In order to understand this we asked advisers to point and rank what they consider to be their three primary job functions. Additionally, we asked them to state the frequency of time spent in certain broad policy activities and then more specific tasks. The idea was to be able to discern between steering

and more technical policy functions. Questionnaire material is further triangulated with interview material.

Looking at the data on Belgium we observe that Belgian ministerial cabinet advisers at the federal level perceive the provision of strategic advice as their top primary job function (table 7). Despite being involved in the nuts and bolts of policy making figures high, it is mainly a third choice. Coordination and management comes up as a slightly less frequent policy activity than involvement with policy technicalities, and this may lead us to believe that steering is less important. However, data on the frequency of specific tasks reveals a tendency towards steering rather than technicalities.

Table 7: Policy role of the Belgian Adviser

Nature of policy function /activity / task	**Top 3 Primary Job Functions**	**Very Frequent Activities** **(Once a week & daily)**	**Very Frequent Tasks** **(Once a week & daily)**
Steering	Strategic Advice (67,6%) 41,1% as 1st choice	Coordination and management (45,4%)	Ask officials to provide memos or advice (66,6%) Read and comment on official departmental advice (75,7%) Monitor the implementation of policy (24,2%)
Technical	Being involved in the nuts and bolts of policy (52,9%) 32,3% as 3rd choice	Policy Technicalities (72,7%)	Analyse and evaluate implemented policy (33,3%) Prepare policy files and memos (87,8%) Produce evidence and facts in support of policy making (42,4%)

The steering heavy nature of the Belgian adviser's work is further corroborated by interview material. According to Belgian Adviser 30:

There is an administration but it needs steering. It has to respect the timing, it needs a lot of time and meetings with the heads of sections. To see where, with the administration, we want to go. When do the proposals need to be ready, when are we going to talk about them on the political level, when with the stakeholders. For this, there is a need for a lot of internal steering in order to get the text good and perfect, to be sure it will be passed. Is the text ready? It should have been ready by today. Yes, but it is only going to be ready tomorrow. This takes up a big part of your time. [Own translation]

According to Belgian Adviser 22:

We are only intermediaries between the minister and the administration that executes the task. Because the Minister cannot do everything on his own he has employees who liaise with the administration and on the other hand look at their results and output and comment on them. [Own translation]

Overall, it may be argued that the average policy profile of the Belgian adviser appears to be that of a strategic adviser who steers policy, a "fixer" who mends, monitors policy and intervenes, while being also frequently involved in the nuts and bolts of policy technicalities.

Moving now to the Greek case (table 8) the data in hand reveals that the average Greek adviser is also highly involved with the technicalities of policy making. However, much like their Belgian counterparts, Greek advisers focus more on steering, rather than on the technical side of policy making. A difference between Belgian and Greek advisers is that the latter perceive themselves more clearly as policy managers, rather than strategic advisers. This may reflect two things: a) a sample bias caused by minister related specificities and preferences. The two ministers under investigation projected a clear tendency in organising and staffing their office with project managers and this may be a preference specific to their management style. b) a time period bias caused by the fact that policy making in the period under investigation took place within the strict policy conditionality of the Economic Adjustment Program. In such a strict environment strategic choices are usually decided beforehand, targets are already set in advance, space for manoeuvre is rather limited and advisers act as time managers and accelerators of the government program. As Connaughton (2015, p. 40) argues about Irish advisers the economic adjustment program "has necessitated ministerial advisers to become more focused on the delivery of reforms".

Table 8: Policy role of Greek advisers

Nature of policy function /activity / task	**Top 3 Primary Job Functions**	**Very Frequent Activities** **(Once a week & daily)**	**Very Frequent Tasks** **(Once a week & daily)**
Steering	Managing Projects (71.4%)	Coordination & Management (71.4%)	Ask officials to provide memos or advice (67,8%) Read and comment on official departmental advice (64.2%) Monitor the implementation of policy (35.67%)
Technical	Formulating policy measures (42.8%)	Policy technicalities (53.5%)	Analyse and evaluate implemented policy (50%) Prepare policy files and memos (42.77%) Produce evidence and facts in support of policy making (42.8%)

Having said this, we can safely argue that what seems to be beyond doubt is the role of Greek advisers as fixers. This is also corroborated by interviews with both the political executive and the senior civil service.

According to Greek Minister A:

The adviser's main role is complementary to that of the administration. He speeds up the policy process, facilitating its implementation… Essentially he acts as a multiplier and an accelerator, fast and in a wide range of areas… The adviser is the timing belt, the gear that connects the crankshaft to the camshaft, making the government machine work on time. [Own translation]

This facilitation – acceleration function of the ministerial adviser has also sprung up in one of our interviews with top civil servants. According to SCS respondent 1:

Beyond input in ideas and knowledge, the adviser can accelerate the policy process and in this way better service the citizen. [Own translation]

Moving, finally, to the European Commission cabinet advisers, it may be argued that unlike their Greek counterparts, but much like their Belgian peers, EC advisers perceive themselves as strategic advisers who coordinate and manage policy, while liaising with other parts of the Commission (Table 9). Much like both Belgian and Greek advisers, EC Cabinet advisers appear to be also highly focused on policy steering. This is evident both in the frequency of policy activities performed and even more so in the time spent on specific policy tasks.

Table 9: Policy role of the EC cabinet adviser

Nature of policy function / activity / task	**Top 3 Primary Job Functions**	**Very Frequent Policy Activities (once a week & daily)**	**Very Frequent Policy Tasks (once a week & daily)**
Steering	Strategic advice advisers (87,5%) Liaising with the EU Commission DGs (56,25%)	Coordination & Management (93,75%)	Ask officials to provide memos or advice on specific policy issues (93,75%) Read and comment on departmental advice (93,75%) Monitor the implementation of policy (56,25%)
Technical	Nuts and bolts of policy (43,75%)	Policy technicalities (80%)	Prepare policy files and memos (93,75%) Analyse and evaluate implemented policy (62,25%) Spend time in producing evidence and facts in support of policy making (37,5%)

4.3 Political role

Is the ministerial cabinet adviser's political role active, passive, or variable? In order to understand this we asked advisers to point and rank what they consider to be their three primary job functions. Additionally, we asked them to state the frequency of time spent in certain broad policy activities and more specific tasks. The idea was to be able to discern between active, passive and variable political roles. The provided answers were triangulated through interviews.

The data in hand (table 10) reveals that the Belgian adviser is a highly active political agent. Despite projecting some passivity or variability in relation to certain policy functions or tasks, overall the data point to an active political role with a special function in relation to looking out for potentially harmful issues to the minister.

Table 10: Political role of the Belgian adviser

Nature of political role	**Top 3 primary functions**	**Very Frequent Political Activities (once a week & daily)**	**Very Frequent Political Tasks (once a week & daily)**
Active (more than 40%)	Advising on political considerations (55,8%) Looking out for affairs affecting the minister (84,8%)	Politics (Party, MPs, Minister's electoral district, Networking) (51,5%)	Convey or clarify Minister's wishes (66,6%) Represent the minister at departmental meetings (63,6%)
Passive (less than 30%)			Meet with MPs (21,2%) Receive external delegations on the ministers behalf (21,2%)
Variable (between 30% and 40%)			Represent the minister at public events 9+1 (30,3%) Raise and debate new policy initiatives with the Minister 11 (33,3%)

The interview material corroborates this. Belgian Adviser 30 places the previously discussed issues of technical expertise/specialisation and policy roles into its political context.

I think that in Belgium your network and politics are more important than your technical knowledge. […] Networking with other political parties also plays a big role: negotiation on if we are going to launch something and conditions for other parties. This is how it works. [Own translation]

Belgian Adviser 30 also gives further insight into the political role of advisers:

When you launch something there are many invitations for the minister to say something about it. S/he cannot go to every event, so then you jump in for the minister. Sometimes you are also alone in the Parliament. Then you represent him/her in the parliamentary commissions. Those are the two most important cases when you represent the minister… and sometimes also receptions as well. There are a lot of receptions at night. Then you have to go, because it is there where you meet a lot of people. There you also go to as the responsible of the minister, also because people there see you that way. [Own translation]

The question then becomes to what extent is the Belgian adviser also a party apparatchik? The answers to the questionnaire above reveal that Belgian advisers act more as minister bodyguards/minders, than partisans.

According to Belgian Adviser 40 an adviser does not have to be a party member, though sharing similar political opinions to the minister clearly helps.

Not having a member card does not play a role, sharing preferences plays a role as long as this is on the specific policy field you will be working on. If you think that there needs to be austerity on the cabinet of social security, but your minister thinks the opposite, well then you won't go working there. On the other hand, in an environmental ministry, you can perfectly differ on opinions on marriages because it does not matter anyway. Then you can have an interesting discussion, but the minister won't fire you because of this. It is about reliability: they need to know that you are reliable to the minister. Whether you are a member or not is not the most important thing, although sometimes pressure is being put on this from time to time. [Own translation]

Belgian Adviser 22 also highlights this point:

I was part of a Vice-Minister's cabinet, and in the negotiations with the other parties I had to defend the opinion of the Minister. [Own translation]

In contrast to Belgian advisers, Greek advisers' political role comes up as much more variable (table 11). To begin with, an important minority, 35%, do consider providing advice on political considerations as one of advisers' top three primary job functions. Moreover, certain political tasks such as conveying ministerial demands to the bureaucracy also come up as important. Yet, others like representing the minister appear to be less pronounced. What is impressive is how little time, comparatively to their Belgian counterparts, Greek advisers appear to spend in overt political activities and specific political tasks, especially of the partisan nature. Is there an explanation? According to Gouglas (2015, p. 21) overt political work of the partisan type in Greece, for example elections or maintaining support for the minister and relations with the party, is mainly outsourced to the political-electoral office (Vouleftiko Grafeio) that the minister maintains as a Member of Parliament. In one of the interviews Greek Senior Civil Servant 4 highlighted that there may also be a trend away from typical political party apparatchik advisers

Old advisers were more party oriented. In the last years there has been an increase in quality. You get people with higher skills and standards. This is a general trend irrespective of who the Minister is. [Own translation]

Table 11: Political Role of Greek Adviser

Nature of political role	**Top 3 primary functions**	**Very Frequent Political Activities (once a week & daily)**	**Very Frequent Political Tasks (once a week & daily)**
Active (More than 40%)			Convey or clarify Minister's wishes (57,1%)
Passive (less than 30%)		Politics (Party, MPs, Minister's electoral district, Networking) (25%)	Maintain relations with the electoral district of the minister (10,7%) Meet with MPs (10,7%) Meet with Party officials (10,7%) Receive external delegations on the ministers behalf (21,4%)
Variable (30%)	Advising on political considerations (35,57%)		Represent minister at departmental meetings (32,1%)

Finally, looking at the political role of European Commission Cabinet advisers we observe that those actors project a variable role in terms of primary job function perceptions, but a highly active one in terms of political role activities and specific tasks of a political nature. How can this be interpreted? Much like in the Belgian and Greek cases EC advisers' active or variable political role is focused on maintaining the commissioner's line through to the administration. The high score in the politics dimension, if it is interpreted as partisanship is a bit of a paradox. However, the interview material clarifies the non-partisan but highly political nature of EC advisers' political work.

Table 12: Political role of EC cabinet adviser

Nature of political role	Top 3 primary functions	Very Frequent Political Activities (once a week & daily)	Very Frequent Political Tasks (once a week & daily)
Active (>40%)		Politics (Party, MPs, Minister's electoral district, Networking) (68,75%)	Convey or clarify Commissioner's wishes (100%) Represent the Commissioner in internal meetings (87,5%) Receive external delegations on the Commissioner's behalf (56,25%)
Passive (<30%)			Meet with MEPs (18,75%)
Variable (30% - 40%)	Advice on political considerations (50%) rank it as 2nd and 3rd choice,		Represent the Commissioner in public events (31,25%)

According to EC Cabinet Adviser 1

Commissioners usually do bring one single partisan, responsible for constituency work back home, but this is usually it". [Own translation]

EC Cabinet Adviser 2 also corroborates the above

We are less partisans. This is because, in our case, the Commissioner is not going to return (to her constituency). Even her appointment was not based on party affiliations but rather on her popularity and expertise. So we generally do not have to do much on this field. Of course, some of my colleagues are assigned to monitor the [national] media and the situation in the [country] because she is [nationality] and wants to be aware of these things". [Own translation]

4.4 Communication role

Having analysed the relevant data on the profile, policy and political role of EC cabinet advisers, we now proceed into analysing data concerning a fourth characteristic, their communication role. Does it reflect political or technical/managerial characteristics, or maybe both? In order to understand this we asked advisers to point and rank what they consider to be their three primary

job functions. Additionally, we asked them to state the frequency of time spent in certain broad communication activities and more specific communication tasks.

Belgian advisers appear to have a variable communication role (table 13). In terms of the actual art of media and political communication, which requires both technical and political work, they do not perceive it to be a primary job function. This is understandable, given the presence of organized communication and press teams within the ministerial cabinets. However, almost half of the advisers in our sample appear to spend significant time in dealing with media and communication activities, though paradoxically in the Belgian case this does not translate into being highly involved with writing press statements or speeches. This can be explained as political advisers being involved in policy portfolios are also providing feedback to their media and communication colleagues who do most of the media and communication work. Outside conventional media and communication functions, activities and tasks, there is also adviser communication and interaction with the department, which can also involve technical and political work. At the more technical side, as we saw above the average Belgian adviser frequently asks officials to provide memos or advice, while on the more political one s/he conveys/clarifies the ministers wishes to the administration.

Table 13: Communication role of Belgian advisers

Nature of communication role	**Top 3 primary functions**	**Frequency of Communication Activities** **(once a week & daily)**	**Frequency of Communication Tasks** **(once a week & daily)**
Technical/Management			Ask officials to provide memos or advice (81,8%)
Political			Convey / clarify minister's wishes (66,6%)
Both	Providing media and communication advice (15,1%)	Communication with the media (45,4%)	Write Press Statements (21,2%) Write Speeches (18,2%)

Greek advisers also appear to have a variable communication role (table 14). About a fourth of them perceive media and communication to be their primary job function, which ranks them higher than Belgium. Much like in the case of Belgium though, a greater number is involved in media and communication activities (42,8%). To the extent Greek advisers consider media and communication as part of their primary job functions, as well as to the extent they are involved in such activities, which among others include writing up speeches and press statements, Greek advisers use both technical (drafting, presenting) and political communication skills (targeting the public with a political message). Beyond conventional media and communication roles, which target the public, Greek advisers also communicate within the department. There too their

communication role appears to be variable. To the extent they ask the department's view on policy this falls within their more managerial communication function. To the extent they convey and clarify the minister's wishes this is clearly a more political communication role.

Table 14: Communication role of Greek advisers

Nature of communication role	**Top 3 primary functions**	**Frequency of Communication Activities** **(once a week & daily)**	**Frequency of Communication Tasks** **(once a week & daily)**
Technical/Management			Ask officials to provide memos or advice (67.8%)
Political			Convey / clarify minister's wishes (57.1%)
Both	Providing Media and Communication Advice 8 (28.5%)	Media and Communication 12 (42,8%)	Write Press Statements 9 (32,1%) Write Speeches 6 (21,4%)

European Commission cabinet advisers also appear to have a variable communication role (table 15). As in the case of Belgium and Greece, only a small fraction appears to consider media and communication as part of their primary job activities, yet a higher percentage gets frequently involved in media and communication activities. In the case of the EC a significantly higher number of advisers is involved in writing up speeches and press statements. Beyond, media and communication per se, which require a synthesis of both technical and political communication roles, advisers appear to spend significant time in writing up strategy papers and policy reports, which again reveal a dual communication role that requires both technical and political criteria. On the fully political side of things advisers represent the Commissioner and convey his/her wishes. On the fully technical/managerial aspect of their work they appear to mobilise their Directorate General's (DG) resources through various tasks like asking civil servants to provide memos and official advice on specific topics.

Table 15: Communication role of EC cabinet advisers

Nature of communication functions / activities / tasks	Top 3 primary functions	Frequency of Communication Activities (once a week & daily)	Frequency of Communication Tasks (once a week & daily)
Technical / Management			Ask officials to provide memos or advice on specific policy issues 15 (93,75%)
Political			Convey or clarify Commissioner's wishes 16 (100%)
Both	Media and Communication Advice 1+3 (25%)	Media and Communication 7 (43,75%)	Write Strategy Plans and Policy Reports 13 (81,25%) Write speeches 10 (62,5%) Write Press Statements 7 (43,75%)

4.5 Impact

Having analysed data on advisers' profile, policy, political and communication roles we are now able to analyse and decide on the final characteristic, which is crucial for the typology, advisers' impact. Is the impact of EC cabinet advisers mainly expertise, politics, management or mutuality? We answer this question through an analysis of the data gathered in the questionnaire as a whole, as well as through material gathered in interviews.

To begin with, the impact of the average Belgian adviser appears to be management (coordinator) followed by mutuality (minder). The Belgian adviser comes up as a fixer who is also highly politically active, by acting as the minister's bodyguard. The aim behind this role is not political dominance, but primarily the protection of the minister from issues that may be potentially harmful.

Greek advisers, too, appear to be "fixers within the policy-making process, who are not overtly partisan, but are politically aware, concentrating primarily on managing the ministry's program and ensuring that policy output remains on track" (Gouglas 2015, p. 21). In this respect, Greek advisers' impact appears as a more clear-cut case of management in terms of impact rather than knowledge, political dominance or mutuality.

Finally, much like in the case of Belgium, in the case of the European Commission, advisers' impact appears to be a synthesis between management and mutuality. First of all their impact is management, as they perform significant policy steering functions, activities and tasks. Second, they come up as highly active political agents, not in relation to ensuring the Commissioner's political dominance (after all Commissioners are not re-elected) but as was the case of Belgium in respect to mutuality. They are politically alert, looking actively for politically harmful issues to the Commissioner's agenda (Gouglas et al 2014).

4.6 Conclusion: Experts, Minders, Coordinators or Partisans?

Where does this all leave us in relation to Connaughton's (2010a, 2010b, 2015) typology? There are two ways of approaching the subject. First, based on the data above we come up with the average adviser type per ministerial cabinet system. We adopt this aggregate level approach for all three ministerial cabinet systems. Second, we could also classify advisers on an individual basis. This individual level analysis offers greater precision, but thus far it has only been conducted in the case of Belgian ministerial cabinet advisers.

Table 16 below summarises the characteristics of advisers roles and based on this scores the dominant type of adviser found in every ministerial cabinet system.

Table 16: Average Adviser Type per ministerial cabinet system

Cabinet System	Profile	Political role	Communication role	Policy making role	Impact	ADVISER TYPE
Belgium	Generalist (coordinator)	Active (Minder not Partisan)	Both technical/managerial and political (coordinator)	Fixer (coordinator)	Management (coordinator) Mutuality (minder)	Coordinator / minder hybrid
Greece	Generalist (coordinator)	Variable (coordinator)	Both technical/managerial and political (coordinator)	Fixer (Coordinator)	Management (Coordinator)	Coordinator pure
European Commission	Generalist (coordinator)	Active (Minder not partisan)	Both technical/managerial and political (coordinator)	Fixer (coordinator)	Management (coordinator) Mutuality (minder) Knowledge (expert)	Coordinator / minder hybrid with a slight expert touch

The average Belgian adviser appears to be highly educated with previous public sector experience, yet s/he is a generalist in that the usually assigned portfolios on which s/he works do not necessarily match the existing individual expertise. The political role of the average Belgian adviser is active in the minder and not the partisan sense of the word. The average Belgian adviser appears to first and foremost mind for issues harmful to the political executive, working more like a bodyguard rather than a party apparatchik indulging into the politics of political dominance. The average Belgian adviser communicates both in technical/managerial and political terms. More importantly the policy role of the average Belgian adviser reflects that of a fixer who mends and monitors policy, while the impact of his/her work is primarily management followed by mutuality, that is a synthesis of coordination and protection of the political executive from harm. Based on the data in hand, the average profile of the Belgian ministerial cabinet adviser is that of a hybrid of the coordinator and minder types.

The average Greek ministerial cabinet adviser appears also to be a highly educated generalist. However, unlike the Belgian case, the average adviser in Greece portrays a rather variable political role. While politically alert, s/he comes up as rather passive when it comes to overt political activities, especially partisan ones. Her/his communication role is both technical/managerial and political. In terms of policy making s/he is a pure fixer whose impact is management. The Greek adviser in our sample appears to fit quite clearly in Connaughton's coordinator type.

Finally, the average European Commission cabinet adviser too appears to be a highly educated generalist, though with significant previous experience from the EC institutions. Much like in Belgium, the average EC cabinet adviser has a highly active political role, which is more of the bodyguard (protection of the Commissioner from harm), rather than of the 'party apparatchik' kind. As with both Greece and Belgium, the EC cabinet adviser communicates both in technical/managerial and political terms. In relation to the policy role the average EC cabinet adviser is also predominantly a fixer. Her/his impact though goes beyond management, to mutuality (protecting the Commissioner) and to a certain extent knowledge. In this respect, it may be argued that the average EC cabinet adviser type comes up as a hybrid of the coordinator type with that of the minder, with a light shade of the expert type.

How useful is this aggregation into average adviser profiles? Do we get different results if we are to treat data on the individual level? Instead of asking what is the average adviser profile, why not count how many advisers of which type are to be found in every ministerial cabinet system? The data on Belgium show that despite the greater precision we get through this route, the general picture remains largely the same (table 17).

Table 17: Roles per individual Belgian Adviser

Role according to typology of Connaughton

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Expert	2	5,0	5,9	5,9
	Partisan	1	2,5	2,9	8,8
	Coordinator	13	32,5	38,2	47,1
	Minder	3	7,5	8,8	55,9
	Coordinator and Minder	4	10,0	11,8	67,6
	Expert and Minder	2	5,0	5,9	73,5
	Minder and Partisan	1	2,5	2,9	76,5
	Coordinator and Expert	3	7,5	8,8	85,3
	Coordinator and Partisan	1	2,5	2,9	88,2
	Minder, Coordinator and Partisan	1	2,5	2,9	91,2
	Expert, Coordinator and Partisan	1	2,5	2,9	94,1
	politically active Expert and Minder	1	2,5	2,9	97,1
	Minder with emphasis on policy technicalities	1	2,5	2,9	100,0
	Total	34	85,0	100,0	
Missing	Missing value	6	15,0		
Total		40	100,0		

In a group of 40 respondents, of which 6 were excluded due to missing data in certain questions, 13 Belgian advisers fall within the clear coordinator type, 3 are pure minders and 4 are both coordinator and minders. This is already 20 advisers, which makes up 58,8% of our valid percent. Moreover, as we observe in table 17, both the coordinator and the minder type continues to come up in various combinations with other types in another six respondents, raising the percentage at an even higher level.

In view of the above results, the hypothesis according to which ministerial cabinet systems comprise of different types of advisers is confirmed.

This is further corroborated by interviews with EC members of cabinet. As a Deputy Chief of Cabinet stated:

I think we have a good mix of technical expertise, political knowledge of the home country and managerial qualifications. A good cabinet needs to serve all these roles, as it is important to deliver on all the aspects. [Own translation]

However, it is also clear from the data in hand that in ministerial cabinet systems there emerges a dominant type of adviser. The average adviser appears to be that of the coordinator on its pure or variant hybrid forms, the most important of which in the systems under consideration is a synthesis with the minder type. In this respect the hypothesis that there is no dominant adviser type is disconfirmed.

5. Working across three arenas: responsibility or opportunity?

We now move on to examine the arenas in which advisers' policy work is more pronounced. The question here is the following: which arena(s) constitutes the core part of their work and which represents more of an opportunity than responsibility? Working with the department (1st arena), working within the executive (2nd arena) or working with stakeholders (3rd arena) (Maley 2015)? In order to understand this we asked advisers to point and rank what they consider to be their three primary job functions. Additionally, we asked them to state the frequency of time spent in certain broad activities and more specific tasks. We triangulated the above data with material from interviews.

In table 18 we can see that Belgian advisers work intensively on all three arenas.

Table 18: Working across three arenas. Belgian advisers

Arena	**Top 3 primary functions**	**Frequency of Activities (once a week & daily)**	**Frequency of Tasks (once a week & daily)**	**Opportunity or Responsibility?**
Vertical Coordination: working with the department	Liaising with other parts of the department (23,5%)	Coordination and management (of policy work, the cabinet staff, civil servants) (29,4%)	Attend meetings with federal civil servants (58,8%)	Responsibility
Intra-executive Coordination: working within other political executives			Meet advisers from other ministerial cabinets (85,29%) Meet with other federal institutions officials to coordinate policy (38,2%)	Responsibility
Horizontal Governance Coordination: working with stakeholders	Coordinating relations with stakeholders (50%)		Broker meetings with interest groups (50%)	Responsibility

In relation to the first two arenas this should not come up as a surprise. Work with the administration is to be expected. Belgian adviser 40 has summarized the whole process

The most important thing you had to do was to prepare legislative and executive texts. Consulting/debating/negotiating with the other parties and present these in the council of ministers for first and second reading and if necessary let them be approved in the parliament. That is actually your task … [first] You have to negotiate/communicate with the administration: "how are we going to execute this part of the government agreement, do we have to study thing about it, do we get it well enough what we want to do?". Okay, then we make a design. [Own translation]

The consociational and consensus nature of Belgian democracy, on the centre of which lies coalition government politics, requires intensive coordination and heavy political and policy work not only within the department, but also across the coalition government parties. As Belgian adviser 40 stated

Once you have a design of a legislative text then you will negotiate with the vice-prime ministers of all political parties plus the cabinet-premier: and there you discuss the text. From A till Z and back, so if you achieve something then you go to the council of minister for first reading and then to Council of State (raad van state) for a second reading. That is the most essential of your tasks, and everything else you do depends on this.[Own translation]

Finally, the moderately strong corporatist nature of interest intermediation in Belgium means that a coordinated, cooperative institutionalised system of policy making is in place. This in term means that advisers work with stakeholders as part of their core work. It is for them a responsibility rather than an opportunity. As Belgian adviser 40 stated:

So if you meet stakeholder, or the sector, or other organisations. If you have an informal negotiation, or one with the research centre of your party: no matter what those are, all serve to inform you to the maximum, such that your text would carry as much consensus as possible and would be as good as possible in executive terms. [Own translation]

In contrast to the average Belgian adviser, the average Greek adviser of our sample appears to be more fully focused on working within the department and across the executive, mainly with peers (table 19). This is a responsibility. Working with stakeholders appears as more of an opportunity, which one out of three Greek advisers do nevertheless appear to take up. It may be argued that this reflects the broader Greek setting where the Political Offices of the Minister form part of a core executive government that has been described as fragmented and suffering from a "deep rooted problem of coordination" (Featherstone & Papadimitriou, 2013, pp. 524, 525). Advisers and cabinets do appear as a first solution to this problem. Beyond this, though, the majoritarian and winner takes all nature of Greek electoral and executive politics does not constitute working with stakeholders a necessity, but rather an opportunity which can be grabbed by advisers and their political executives on an ad hoc basis.

Table 19: Coordinating across three arenas. Greek advisers

Arena	Top 3 primary functions	Frequency of Activities (once a week & daily)	Frequency of Tasks (once a week & daily)	Opportunity or Responsibility?
Vertical Coordination: working with the department		Coordination and management (of policy work, the cabinet staff, civil servants) (71,4%)	Meet with departmental officials (78,57%)	Responsibility
Intra-executive Coordination: working within other political executives			Meet advisers from other ministerial cabinets (75%)	Responsibility
Horizontal Governance Coordination: working with stakeholders	Coordinating relations with stakeholders (32,1%)		Broker meetings with interest groups (28,57%)	Opportunity

Finally, as is the case in Belgium, but contrary to Greece, the work of the average EC cabinet adviser is a responsibility across all three arenas (table 20). Working within the department is a core responsibility. As EC adviser 1 stated

[…] we are in daily contact with the Directors-General and the Directors. […] In practice, cabinets can impose certain positions to the services, encourage the initiation of a policy draft or express their disapproval of the scope of a given proposal. This is day-to-day business for us. [Own translation]

Coordinating across the Commission is also a core responsibility of advisers' work. The interview with an EC Policy Assistant corroborated this

"*There are regular meetings among advisers and every Monday the chefs de cabinet meet in order to prepare the meeting of the College of Commissioners that takes place every Wednesday*" [Own translation]

The Commissioners' agenda is always considered at a weekly meeting of the heads of the Commissioners' cabinets" while "feeding into *chefs de cabinet* meetings are the outcomes of meetings between the cabinet members responsible for particular policy areas" (Nugent 2010, p. 120).

Table 20: Coordinating across three arenas. EC

Arena	**Top 3 primary functions**	**Frequency of Activities (once a week & daily)**	**Frequency of Tasks (once a week & daily)**	**Opportunity or Responsibility?**
Vertical Coordination: working with the department	Liaising with the Commission 9 (56,25%)	Coordination and Management of policy work, the Cabinet Staff, Civil Servants 15 (93,75%)	Attend meetings with European Commission's DG Civil Servants to discuss the nuts and bolts of policy 12 (75%)	Responsibility
Intra-executive Coordination: working within other political executives			Meet advisers from other EC cabinets 13 (81,25%)	Responsibility
Horizontal Governance Coordination: working with stakeholders	Coordinating with stakeholders 4 (25%)		Broker meetings with interest groups 8 (50%)	Responsibility

Finally, working with stakeholders is also an advisers' core work responsibility. As EC adviser 3 stated

"Our cabinet interacts with a wide range of actors. We usually get a huge amount of requests to meet with stakeholders, to deliver speeches on behalf of the Commissioner, to represent him/her in a political context in the EP, at workshop level with MEPs etc. I think it is one of the prime tasks and this is why cabinets should be composed of people who are able to perform in public."

But how can working with stakeholders as an institutional responsibility be explained? According to Gouglas et al (2014) this can be explained by the nature of lobbying, the logic of granting access to interest groups and the pattern of interest representation at the EU level. To begin with, interest groups and stakeholders seek to gain access to and influence the main EU institutions: the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and increasingly the European Parliament. Traditionally, the European Commission, and particularly lower civil servants who undertake most of the policy preparatory work at an early stage and have technical know-how, have been the main focus of lobbying activities. However, the Commissioner, the cabinet and high civil servants are also the targets of ad hoc high level lobbying. Lobbying, though, is not a unidirectional activity of interest groups versus the EU institutions, but it can be better seen as the exchange of resources between interdependent organizations. Interest groups seek access and influence, but EU institutions also want to interact with stakeholders, having as their goal the acquisition of information and knowledge, as well as building of support and legitimacy for the proposed policy. This is the logic of access described by Bouwen (2002, 2004, 2009). Finally, it may be argued that this logic of access is interlinked to an EU system of interest representation, which with the exception of social policy, can be better described as either neo-pluralist or elite pluralist (Hix, 2005, Coen 1997). In relation to the former, unlike corporatism, there is no privileged access of certain groups, but officials activate the relevant interest(s) in a specific policy issue. This happens through financial support or the use of informal rules and guidelines, such as the recent European Transparency Initiative. In relation to elite pluralism, interest groups and stakeholders are activated through committees and small expert groups (committee governance), hearings or roundtables, and institutionalised consultation fora (forum politics).

6. Discussion / Conclusion

In the present study we examined ministerial cabinet system advisers in Belgium, Greece and the European Commission. We collected data from three different research studies. All three studies used a mixed data collection methods approach: a questionnaire survey was followed by interviews in order to triangulate our data and get a deeper look at it. The survey questions were identical, but not exactly the same. Some change had to happen in order to accommodate the specificities of the EC as a supranational organisation. Moreover, the sampling technique between the Greek survey and the ones on Belgium and the EC differ. In the Greek case the researcher used purposeful sampling, focusing on two ministerial cabinet systems of the same ministry run by two ministers coming from different political parties at a specific time during the economic crisis. The EC and Belgian survey was distributed to the whole population of advisers towards the end of the Commission's and the Belgian government's mandate respectively. The EC survey received a very low response rate due to the fact that it was distributed just before the European Parliament election time. The survey is currently being repeated. The survey on Belgium did not face such a problem as it was conducted after elections on advisers of the previous government. Finally, at a more conceptual level, some answers to survey questions are used as data to different concepts. This is the case in regards to using the answers on primary job functions and frequency of broad policy activities in order to draw conclusions regarding advisers' work at the three arenas. For instance coordination and management of the departmental staff has both a substantive (nature of task) and dimensional (arena) side to it. While this practice can be methodologically checked, it may be argued that if substance and dimension is discerned carefully by the researcher during the analysis

of results it should not be a huge problem. Overall, given the challenges of the present methodological approach we need to highlight that there are limitations to the present study and that findings need to be interpreted under this light.

Having said this, we should not underestimate the findings in hand either. Overall we have data on 84 ministerial cabinet advisers in three ministerial cabinet systems: a historical one, Belgium, a more recent one Greece, and a consolidated but at the supranational level, the European Commission. This allows us to make some claims based on an adequately representative sample.

In relation to the policy cycle hypothesis it is largely confirmed that ministerial cabinet advisers do colonise all stages of the policy cycle. However, the frequency of time spent in every stage differs from system to system, resulting into three different hourglass shapes. In the case of Greece we get a more balanced policy hourglass with two big glass bulbs (front end and back end of the cycle) joined by a thinner neck (decision making). In the Belgian and EC cases it is the policy evaluation and monitoring stage that comes up as less pronounced.

In relation to adviser types, the hypothesis according to which there is no dominant adviser type, but a multitude of roles contingent upon system, policy sector and political executive is partly confirmed. Indeed we do find a multitude of roles in every cabinet, however there does also emerge a dominant adviser type. Which one? The hypothesis of the expert type is here disconfirmed. So is that of the partisan. The average ministerial cabinet adviser seems to be highly educated, at times with important previous experience in the public sector, the cabinet or the world of policy work, who rarely works on the portfolio of his/her expertise. S/he is primarily a fixer who mends and monitors policy, his/her impact being management, acting also as the minister's body guard, a minder protecting the political executive from potential harm. In layman's terms the average ministerial cabinet system adviser appears to be a political policy manager.

Finally, in relation to advisers' dimension of work, the three arenas hypotheses are largely confirmed. Working within the ministry and across the executive constitutes part of the core work of the average ministerial cabinet system adviser. In terms of the latter we find elements of command and control top down management, especially in the Belgian and Greek cases. In relation to the latter the average adviser facilitates inter-executive coordination, be it in coalition government systems like the Belgian one, or in fragmented core executive systems like the Greek and European Commission ones. Where things differ is in relation to work with stakeholders. Whether working along with interest groups and societal actors comes up as an institutionally embedded responsibility, or alternatively, as an opportunity to be grabbed by individual actors on an ad hoc basis, seems to depend on the nature of executive government and the pattern of interest intermediation. In Greek majoritarian politics and weak corporatist culture, advisers spend much less time in working with stakeholders. In Belgian consociational democracy, consensus government and higher levels of corporatism, working with stakeholders seems to be a responsibility. Finally, in the European Commission neo-pluralist system of interest intermediation where the EU institutions actively engage and activate interest groups, providing access in the EU in exchange for knowledge and greater legitimacy, working with stakeholders is also a responsibility.

To conclude, it may be argued that the study of advisers in the Belgian, Greek and European Commission cabinet systems has in some way limited the empirical gap in relation to advisers and policy making in ministerial cabinet systems. Future research could modify/refine the study (make

it more cohesive), repeat it again or expand it to other ministerial cabinet systems like the French, the Italian and the Portuguese ones. An insightful addition to the policy cycle, Connaughton's types (2010a,2010b, 2015) and Maley's (2015) arenas, would be to examine ministerial cabinet advisers as core executive policy coordinators, using Craft's (2015) approach. Moreover, it may be argued that at some point a more systematic comparison would also have to be made with non-ministerial cabinet systems. Are advisers in those systems so totally distinct to their peers in ministerial cabinet systems? Or are we observing a process of 'cabinetisation', affecting not only the organisation of advisory work, but also the substance of the core work of political advisers? The refinement of the 'cabinetisation' concept, a first rough definition of which we sketched in the introduction, along with the implementation of internationally comparative empirical work on ministerial cabinet and non-cabinet systems, can be a useful future contribution to both the ministerial cabinet literature, as well as to the next generation -second wave as Shaw and Eichbaum (2015) coined it- research on political advisers.

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